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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [AORC](#) [EAGR](#) [PREL](#) [KUNR](#) [FAO](#)

SUBJECT: FAO DIRECTOR GENERAL ELECTION: DIOUF STACKS THE
DECK WITH EARLY SUPPORT FROM AFRICA, NEAR EAST, CARIBBEAN

REF: A. (A) 03 ROME 4556

[1](#)B. (B) 03 ROME 5655

Classified By: Ambassador Tony P. Hall

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: At the FAO Conference in November 2005, member governments will elect a Director General (DG) for a six-year term, beginning January 2006. The incumbent, Jacques Diouf (Senegal), who has been in office since 1993, as a still-unannounced candidate, has already garnered endorsements for re-election from the African Union (AU), the Organization of Islamic Conferences (OIC) and the Caribbean Community (Caricom). If the countries belonging to these three organizations maintain internal discipline and vote as a block, Diouf already has enough votes for re-election.

[1](#)2. (C) Perhaps sensing that Diouf may be unstoppable, no government has seriously proposed a challenger. Unless an attractive candidate stands up in the next few weeks, OECD countries -- who clearly signaled a desire for change in FAO and who successfully pushed through term limits that take effect in 2005 (but that do not apply to the incumbent) -- may be facing a fait accompli, despite persistent but discreet efforts to encourage other candidacies. In that case, our best option will be to see what we can get as a condition to tacit OECD acquiescence to Diouf's re-election and continued OECD budgetary support. These might include significant commitments from the DG to further institutional reforms. End summary.

THE PROCESS

[1](#)3. (U) Elections for DG will take place by secret ballot at the ministerial-level FAO Conference to be held in Rome 19-26 November 2005. According to FAO General Rule XXXVI, the DG is elected by a majority of votes cast. If no candidate receives a majority, an additional ballot is held, after which the candidate with the least votes is eliminated. Additional ballots may be held until one candidate receives the required majority. The previous FAO Conference, in December 2003, amended the organization's Constitution to specify that the DG shall be appointed by the Conference for a term of six years, with the possibility of reappointment only once for a further term of four years. The amendment is silent on the application of such a limit on the incumbent (ref B, para 22).

AFRICANS, ISLAMICS, CARIBS PLEDGE SUPPORT

[1](#)4. (SBU) In recent months, FAO DG Jacques Diouf has been almost continually on the road quietly soliciting support for a third term. Although he has not announced his candidacy, he has been very successful in lining up support. Three major organizations have already formally expressed support for Diouf's re-election:

-- the Organization of Islamic Conferences (OIC), at a meeting of foreign ministers in Istanbul, 14-16 June;

-- Caricom, at its Conference of Heads of Government held in Grenada 4-7 July; and

-- the African Union, at its Assembly in Addis Ababa, 6-8 July.

LATIN AMERICA DIVIDED

[1](#)5. (C) For some time, Latin American permreps in Rome have indicated that they felt it was their region's turn for the FAO DG position. Although they made some tentative suggestions of possible Latin candidates, there was no serious follow-up. A trusted contact in the Latin American and Caribbean Group (Grulac) recently told us that the Latin Americans are now divided, with some already expressing support for Diouf.

OECD, WITH SOME EXCEPTIONS, STILL SEEKS CHANGE

16. (C) The OECD Group has been the principal advocate for change at the top of FAO, having spearheaded the reintroduction of term limits. However, with prospects for an FAO DG from the industrialized world being slim (the two other UN agencies in Rome are headed by an American and a Swede, respectively), the OECD has been limited to the indirect role of encouraging the G-77 to come up with good

candidates. An additional complication has been the emergence of fault lines within the EU. We are told that there was a European Council decision in 1996 stipulating that the EU would as a matter of policy not support heads of international agencies for a third term. With respect to Jacques Diouf, most EU members have taken this decision to mean exactly what it says. France and Italy, however, have argued at recent coordination meetings in Brussels that Diouf could be grandfathered in at FAO for another term, given that the recent amendment to the FAO Constitution is purposely silent on the incumbent.

DOING THE ARITHMETIC

17. (C) Our preliminary back-of-the-envelope calculations suggest that Diouf may already have his re-election sewn up, with the endorsement of the AU (53 members), Caricom (15 members, of which 14 are FAO members), and OIC (29 non-AU, non-Caricom members). If these three regional/religious groups maintain internal discipline -- admittedly a big assumption in a secret ballot -- then Diouf could count on roughly 53 + 14 + 29 = 96 votes.

18. (SBU) FAO currently has 188 members. If all of them attend and vote at the next Conference, then a simple majority of 95 would be enough to elect a new DG. By this simple calculation Diouf already has the votes he needs.

19. (C) The situation is of course somewhat more complicated. Some FAO members will probably not be able to vote as a result of unpaid arrears, as was the case for some 35 countries at the 2003 Conference. These may be disproportionately G-77 countries, and their nonvoting status might hurt Diouf disproportionately. At the same time, however, Diouf could probably count on support from at least some Latin American, non-OIC Asian, and Pacific Island nations. The bottom line remains that Diouf probably already has the votes he needs for another term.

WHAT NOW?

10. (C) Since the last FAO Conference in 2003, it has been recognized by champions of reform at FAO that there would be only a limited period of time for countries to put forward and build support for alternative candidates for DG. It now seems almost certain that that window is about to close, if it hasn't already. Being the astute politician that he is, Diouf has been able to consolidate his position through skillful handling of the needs of some G-77 constituencies and opportune use of international fora such as FAO Regional Conferences and meetings of the AU, Caricom and OIC.

11. (C) Although the window is now barely open, it may not necessarily yet be too late to head off a third term. Regional group unity could conceivably be broken -- again, the vote is by secret ballot. Unless an extraordinarily strong and respected fresh candidate comes forward before the end of the summer, however, the game is over in our view. We should begin thinking about how to take advantage of an all-but-inevitable Diouf re-election to help further our objectives of continued strengthening and reform of FAO.

12. (C) We should begin by recognizing that -- notwithstanding our longstanding hopes for fresh blood and new leadership at FAO -- Diouf remains someone we can work with constructively. In the past decade as DG, he instituted significant improvements at FAO, and he did so during a period of severe belt tightening. Ref A paras 9-17 provided an in-depth look at the strengths and weaknesses of Jacques Diouf as Director General. We recognized significant accomplishments, while regretting his shortcomings as a manager and leader, and the impact this has on the agency's effectiveness and staff morale. Diouf's continued support for standard-setting bodies such as Codex Alimentarius and his recent course correction on biotechnology provide indications that he can continue to help advance U.S. and OECD interests, even though he remains in some respects the G-77's standard bearer.

13. (C) For now, however, we should unbendingly stand on principle that we do not support third-term candidates in UN bodies, and that this applies to FAO, as well. The prospect that he might win a third-term at a terrible price in terms of lost US support, tangible and moral, should hang over Diouf's candidacy. Diouf is too crafty a politician not to

realize that a divisive election -) especially one that pits the OECD against the G-77)- would get his next term off to a bad start, and that any chance for a successful term would depend on the continued support of the major donor countries such as the U.S., Japan and UK. Recent discussions with senior Diouf lieutenants indicate to us that Diouf knows well that he has a strong interest in coming to some sort of accommodation with us before the November 2005 Conference. This pre-election season at FAO therefore offers an opportunity to secure Diouf's support for issues of concern to us. Key among those would be his backing for an independent external assessment of FAO.

HALL

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